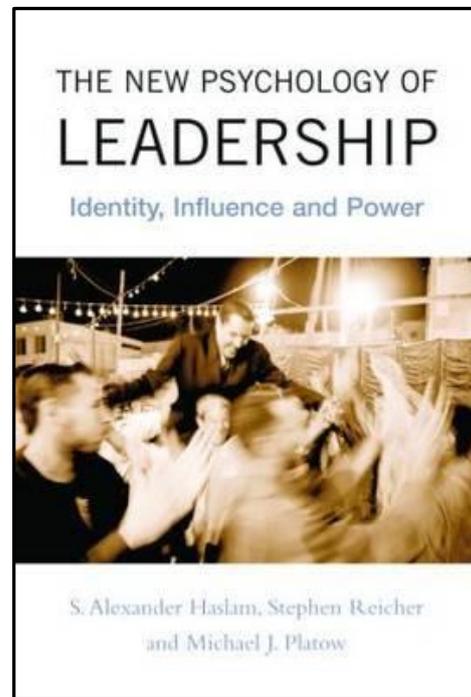




The New Psychology of Leadership – Identity, Influence and Power, S.

Alexander Haslam, Stephen D. Reicher and Michael J. Platow, Psychology Press, East Sussex, 2011.

This book is about what leadership means and about how it works. What is 'new' about it is that it takes an approach based on scientific argument and evidence. Thus *The New Psychology of Leadership* should appeal to and resonate with science teachers. Although an academic text book it is a straightforward, well organised and easy read. If you want to get a feel for what the book is about you could read the Scientific American article the authors wrote on the book's publication [1] and/or the article written by two of the authors on *Rethinking the Psychology of Leadership* [2].



There is no shortage of books on leadership. However many of them are based on identifying the personality characteristics of leaders or the techniques they employ to get people to do what they want them to. The individuals described in these books often do not lead; they are more likely to be managers or administrators who seek compliance from those they attempt to lead through authority or incentives. Such strategies inevitably fall short of the potential of the organisation as the members often game the system to pursue their own self-interest rather than the goals of the manager or administrator. A leader by contrast works to get followers to identify themselves with the goals and a common purpose that they share with the leader. This common purpose gives the followers and their leader a shared identity that creates a 'we' rather than the authoritarian 'I' of the manager or administrator. Such teams with such a shared identity often over-achieve as the talents of the group form something greater than the sum of their parts. By contrast groups that are subject to a manager's authority or incentives often under-achieve as the whole becomes less than the sum of its parts – a useful definition of a dysfunctional organisation. This book argues that to succeed, leaders need to create, champion and embed a sense of group identity of which they themselves are representative.

Chapters 1 and 2 deal with traditional research into leadership which focus on the leader as an individual, discovering their personal traits and qualities (chp 1) and the influence of the circumstances the leader finds them self in and the influence of the perceptions that potential followers have of the leader (chp 2). The discussion in these chapters includes the anomalies and inconsistencies in the evidence base that do not fit the explanations of leadership shown by these traditional approaches. In chapter 3 the authors suggest a new psychology based on the psychology of the group rather than the psychology of an individual to analyse leadership behaviour.

In the next four chapters of the book the authors present the evidence and explanation to support the central thesis in their book. Chapter 4 emphasises the need for leaders to be perceived by their followers to have qualities, attributes and behaviours in common with them. Leaders who look like 'one of us' are seen as better leaders and are more likely to be effective in getting us to do things and make us feel good about doing those things. In chapter 5 we see that in addition leaders have to be seen to stand up for the group and advance its interests, be a champion of the group. That is if the leader is seen to be achieving positive outcomes for the group, 'doing it for us', then group members will be motivated to do the work that makes the vision of the group a reality. Without that leadership action, followers may well support the idea of the group's vision without actually doing the work to make it happen. Chapter 6 deals with the role of the leader in moving a group from how it sees itself in the present to how it would like to see itself in the future. In the authors' terms, moving the group's social identity to a new social reality. To do this the leader has to work to define the perceptions the members of the group have of themselves and of their leader, to define the boundaries of common interest that they share and that bind them together and to define future proposals as an expression of their shared values, beliefs and priorities. Chapter 7 deals with how leaders can influence the behaviour of others. To do this leaders have to create an accord between themselves, their proposals and group identity to achieve power *through* rather than *over* the group. This can be achieved by creating a compelling image of the group's identity, creating displays of that identity that the group participates in and by creating structures and procedures within which the group can operate to advance the common understandings, values and beliefs of the group and its leader.

In the final chapter (chp 8) the authors draw their arguments together to show that leadership is a process of managing social identity. Leadership is rooted in a social relationship between leaders and followers; it is not a matter for leaders alone. If leaders do not form a social relationship with their followers then there is no leadership at all. The holy grail of leadership is to mould group members into a cohesive unit, to generate collective enthusiasm and to guide the application of that enthusiasm.

References:

1. The New Psychology of Leadership, S. Alexander Haslam, Stephen D. Reicher and Michael J. Platow, Scientific American Mind, September 2007
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2. Rethinking the psychology of leadership: From personal identity to social identity, S. Alexander Haslam, Stephen D. Reicher, 2016 https://research-repository.st-andrews.ac.uk/bitstream/handle/10023/8707/Reicher_2016_Leadership_Daedalus_Accepted_Manuscript.pdf?sequence=1 accessed September 2017.